

MARVEL

LUKE CAGE #1

WALKER · BLAKE · MENYZ



PEOPLE COME TO ME WITH THEIR PROBLEMS.

I THINK YOU KNOW WHY I'M HERE.

MOSTLY IT'S PEOPLE WHO FEEL LIKE THE COPS DON'T CARE...

DON'T CAUSE NO TROUBLE, MR. CAGE... PLEASE.

YOU KNOW HOW IT IS, MARLON.
DON'T START NONE...

...OR THE AVENGERS ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO BIGGER PROBLEMS.

...WON'T BE NONE.

MAYBE THEY'D CALL SPIDER-MAN--IF HE WAS LISTED.

MISS LARONDA.
MR. CAGE.

I HEAR SOMEONE RENTED OUT YOUR BANQUET ROOM--THE SPECIAL ONE.

THAT WHAT YOU HEAR?
IF YOU LOOKIN' FOR 'EM, I SHOULD'VE CHECKED THEIR REFERENCES MORE CLOSELY.

MY NUMBER--THAT THEY HAVE.

THIS'LL COVER ANY POTENTIAL DAMAGES TO THE PROPERTY.

MUCH APPRECIATED. THEY DOWNSTAIRS--YOU ALREADY KNOW THE WAY.

TAKE IT EASY ON 'EM.

CAN'T MAKE ANY PROMISES.

THEY CALL ME, 'CAUSE THEY KNOW...

...THEY KNOW THEY
CAN COUNT ON ME.

PEOPLE THINK HAVING
BULLETPROOF SKIN
MEANS YOU DON'T FEEL
THE BULLETS. NOT TRUE.

SLAM



YOU FEEL 'EM.
ESPECIALLY THIS
CLOSE.

EVERYONE SAYS I NEED TO
INVEST IN BULLETPROOF
SHIRTS, BUT THE TRUTH
IS THIS...

...WHEN THE SLUG FROM A NINE
MILLIMETER RIPS THROUGH YOUR
SHIRT BUT BOUNCES OFF YOUR
SKIN...WELL...THAT SCARES THE
HELL OUTTA THE BAD GUYS.

I BUY MY SHIRTS IN BULK--
AT COST. IT'S WORTH THE
INVESTMENT.





ONE MORE
MOVE, AND I
BLOW SHORTY'S
BRAINS ALL OVER
THE PLACE.

WHAT
THE...



...WHAT'RE
YOU DOIN'
HERE?!

COME TO
TAKE YOU
HOME.



MY PARENTS SENT YOU, DIDN'T THEY? LISTEN,
MY BOYFRIEND AND I ARE *GROWN-UPS*,
AND WE DON'T NEED HELP.

HE'LL BE HERE
ANY MINUTE TO PAY
THESE FOOLS THE MONEY
HE OWES THEM, THEN
WE'RE GOIN' HOME!



YOUR BOYFRIEND SKIPPED TOWN
AFTER HE TOLD YOUR PARENTS
YOU WERE BEING HELD
FOR RANSOM.

THEY
CALLED ME.

NOW
I'M HERE.



WHAT?!

YOU LYIN'--
MARKEESE WOULDN'T
DO ME LIKE THAT!
HE LOVES ME!

WHAT ABOUT
THE MONEY HE
OWES ME?! I
WANT MY FIVE
GRAND!



HOLD UP
THERE, BIG WORM...
YOU TELLIN' ME YOU
WENT THROUGH ALL THIS
TROUBLE--KIDNAPPING,
SENDING A RANSOM
NOTE--ALL OF THAT,
FOR *FIVE GRAND?*





DID MY
BOYFRIEND
REALLY SKIP
TOWN?

SORRY,
YEAH--HE
DID.


BUT...
HE SAID HE
LOVED ME.

LOTTA PEOPLE
USE THAT WORD,
BUT DON'T KNOW WHAT
IT MEANS. OR THEY USE
IT TO GET WHAT THEY
WANT--LIKE, WELL...
YOU KNOW.

YOU
SOUND JUST
LIKE MY
DAD.

I MEAN IT.
ANYONE TELLS YOU THEY
LOVE YOU, AND FOLLOWS
IT UP TRYING TO...YOU KNOW...
GOTTA QUESTION WHAT
LOVE MEANS
TO THEM.

C'MON--
LET'S GET YOU
HOME.



While imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, **Luke Cage** was subjected to medical experiments that gave him superhuman strength and bulletproof skin. Once free, he used his abilities to become a Hero for Hire—protecting people who had nowhere else to turn. His mission has taken him to Wakanda, the Savage Land, even Avengers Mansion, but Luke has never forgotten where he came from.

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LATER.

OH, THANK YOU FOR BRINGING OUR BABY HOME SAFE AND SOUND.

MOM, PLEASE.

THANKS, MR. CAGE--FOR EVERYTHING, NOT JUST THE PART WHERE YOU RESCUED ME.

SOMETIMES IT FEELS GOOD, BEING THE HERO.

MR. CAGE, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO REPAY YOU.

I KNOW A GUY LOOKING FOR A JOB. HIS CRIMINAL RECORD AIN'T MAKING IT EASY. GIVE HIM A JOB AT ONE OF YOUR STORES, WE'RE SQUARE.

IT FEELS GOOD-- HELPING PEOPLE IN TROUBLE...

...KNOWING YOU HELPED SAVE LITTLE PIECES OF THE WORLD.

BZZT BZZT BZZT

THIS IS LUKE CAGE.

FEW THINGS FEEL BETTER.

WHAT?

ARE YOU SURE?

BUT IT NEVER LASTS THAT LONG.



NEW ORLEANS.

THE PRIEST IS TALKING--I HEAR WORDS LIKE "DEAR" AND "DEPARTED," BUT THE REST IS JUST NOISE.



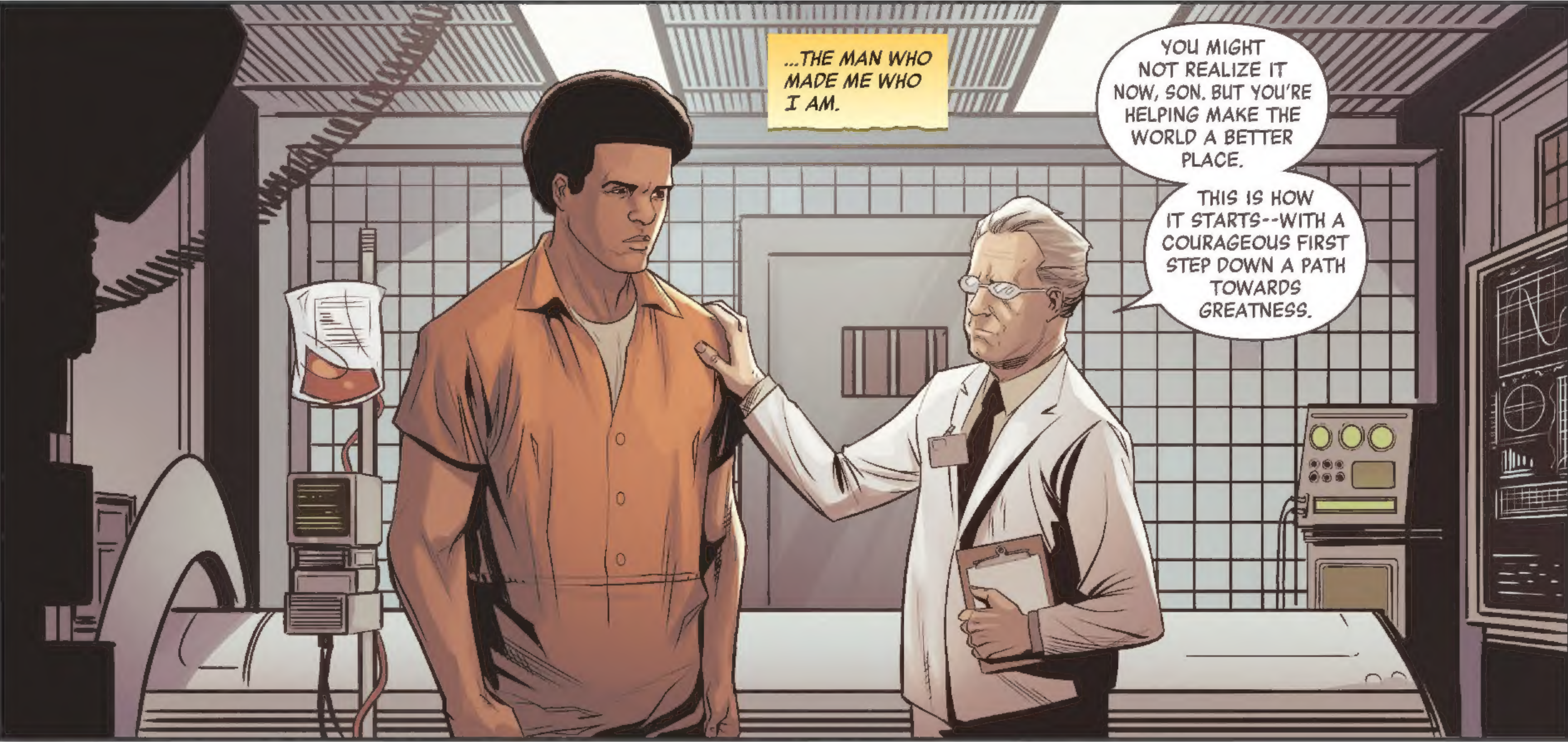
I HEAR EVERY DROP OF RAIN, AND A NAME RINGING IN MY HEAD, OVER AND OVER AGAIN...



NOAH BURSTEIN.



DR. NOAH BURSTEIN...



...THE MAN WHO MADE ME WHO I AM.

YOU MIGHT NOT REALIZE IT NOW, SON. BUT YOU'RE HELPING MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.

THIS IS HOW IT STARTS--WITH A COURAGEOUS FIRST STEP DOWN A PATH TOWARDS GREATNESS.



THERE SHOULD BE MORE PEOPLE HERE. EVERY PERSON I'VE EVER HELPED--EVERY LIFE I'VE EVER SAVED--IT'S BECAUSE OF DR. B.

THEY ALL OWE HIM AS MUCH AS THEY OWE ME.



EXCUSE ME, MR. CAGE-- I WANTED TO INTRODUCE MYSELF.



...I'M DR. LENORE MORNAY--I'M THE ONE WHO CALLED YOU WITH THE TRAGIC NEWS. I WISH...

...I WISH WE WERE MEETING UNDER BETTER CIRCUMSTANCES.



DR. MORNAY...

...I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. I'M STILL... IN SHOCK, I GUESS.

THANKS FOR TRACKING ME DOWN.



NOAH SPOKE OF YOU OFTEN-- HE WAS SO PROUD OF YOU. HE ALWAYS SAID YOU WERE LIKE A SON TO HIM.

YEAH--I KNOW. JUST WISH I'D DONE A BETTER JOB OF STAYING IN TOUCH. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I LAST TALKED TO NOAH. TOO LONG.



MR. CAGE, PLEASE...

LUKE. CALL ME LUKE.

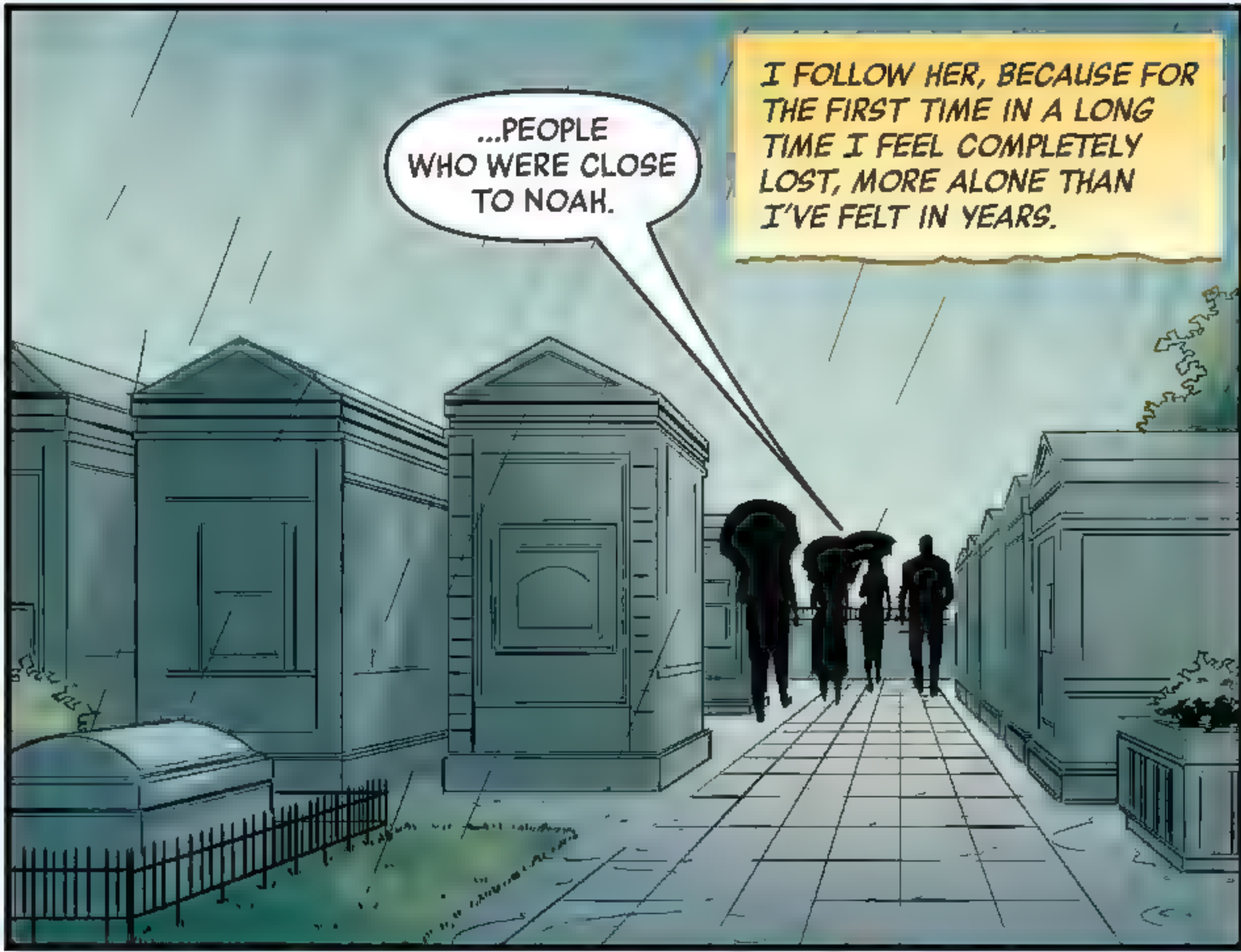
LUKE, DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP.

BUT MAYBE I COULD'VE DONE SOMETHING--KEPT HIM FROM...YOU KNOW...KILLING HIMSELF.



THAT KIND OF THINKING HAS NEVER DONE ANYONE ANY GOOD.

NOW, THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE YOU NEED TO MEET WHILE YOU'RE HERE...



...PEOPLE WHO WERE CLOSE TO NOAH.

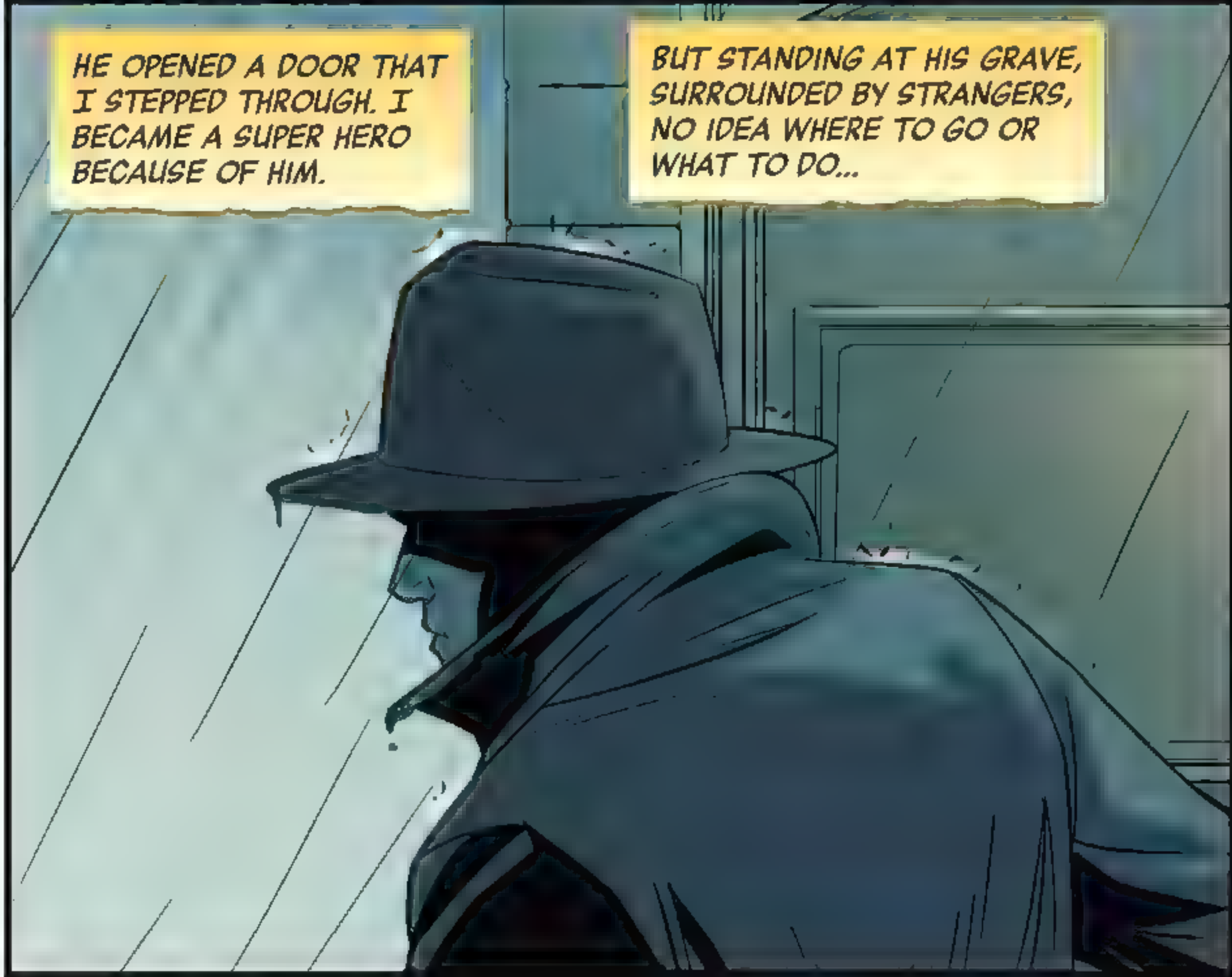
I FOLLOW HER, BECAUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME I FEEL COMPLETELY LOST, MORE ALONE THAN I'VE FELT IN YEARS.



LIKE A CHILD WHOSE PARENT HAS DIED.



DR. NOAH BURSTEIN TRANSFORMED ME INTO ONE OF THE STRONGEST MEN IN THE WORLD.



HE OPENED A DOOR THAT I STEPPED THROUGH. I BECAME A SUPER HERO BECAUSE OF HIM.

BUT STANDING AT HIS GRAVE, SURROUNDED BY STRANGERS, NO IDEA WHERE TO GO OR WHAT TO DO...



ALL THE STRENGTH AND POWER HE GAVE ME...

...IT'S LIKE I NEVER HAD IT.

**THE MORGAN ESTATE.
TEN MILES OUTSIDE
NEW ORLEANS.**

THANK YOU
FOR JOINING US,
MR. CAGE. TIMES LIKE
THIS--FILLED WITH TRAUMA
AND GRIEF--WE NEED TO
SURROUND OURSELVES
WITH OTHERS.

AND EVEN
THOUGH WE'VE
NEVER MET, YOU
REALLY ARE LIKE
FAMILY TO US,
MR. CAGE.



NOAH'S DEATH
HAS HIT US ALL
QUITE HARD--AND
THE FACT THAT IT
WAS A SUICIDE...

NOAH HAD BEEN
DEVASTATED BY THE
DEATH OF HIS WIFE. I
SHOULD HAVE SEEN THIS
COMING, BUT I WAS
TOO CAUGHT UP IN MY
OWN AFFAIRS TO NOTICE
HOW MUCH HE WAS
SUFFERING.

I UNDERSTAND.
BUT LIKE LENORE
TOLD ME, THAT KIND
OF THINKING NEVER
DOES ANYONE
ANY GOOD.

MY SON
IS ESPECIALLY
DEVASTATED. CALEB
OWES HIS LIFE TO
NOAH BURSTEIN...

...AND, TO
BE HONEST, MY
SON ALSO OWES
HIS LIFE TO YOU,
LUKE.



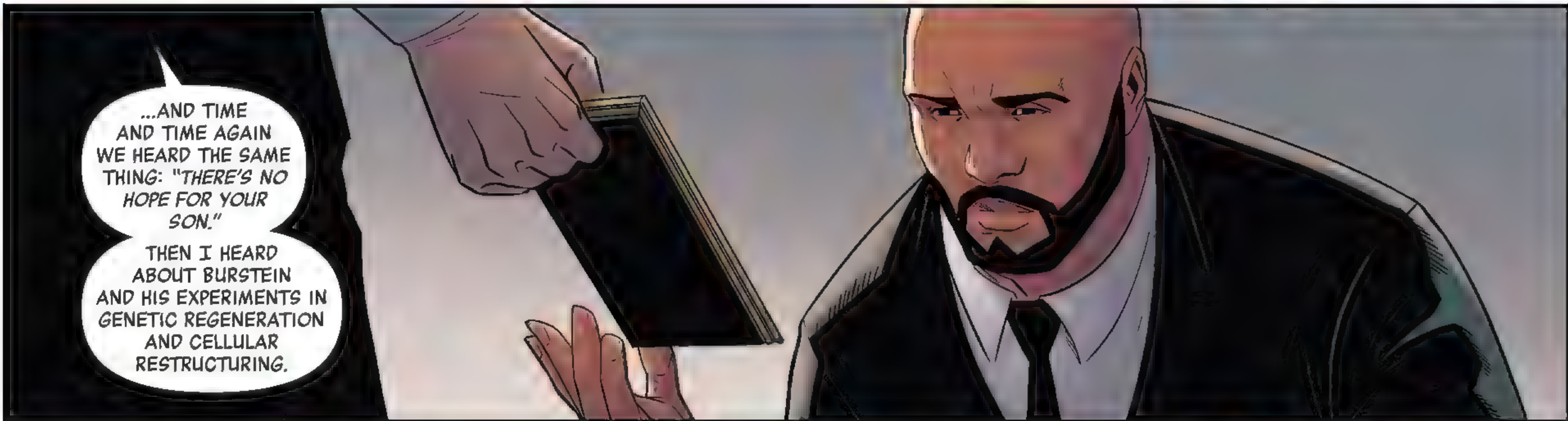
THANKS, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT. I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING FOR YOUR SON.

NOT DIRECTLY, LUKE. BUT IT WAS NOAH'S WORK WITH YOU THAT LED CYRIL TO SEEK HIS HELP IN TREATING CALEB.



CALEB WAS BORN WITH AN INCREDIBLY RARE DISEASE--ATROPHIC RIBONUCLEITIS. THERE IS NO CURE. IT IS 100-PERCENT TERMINAL.

WE HAD CONSULTED WITH HUNDREDS OF DOCTORS, TRIED COUNTLESS DIFFERENT TREATMENTS...

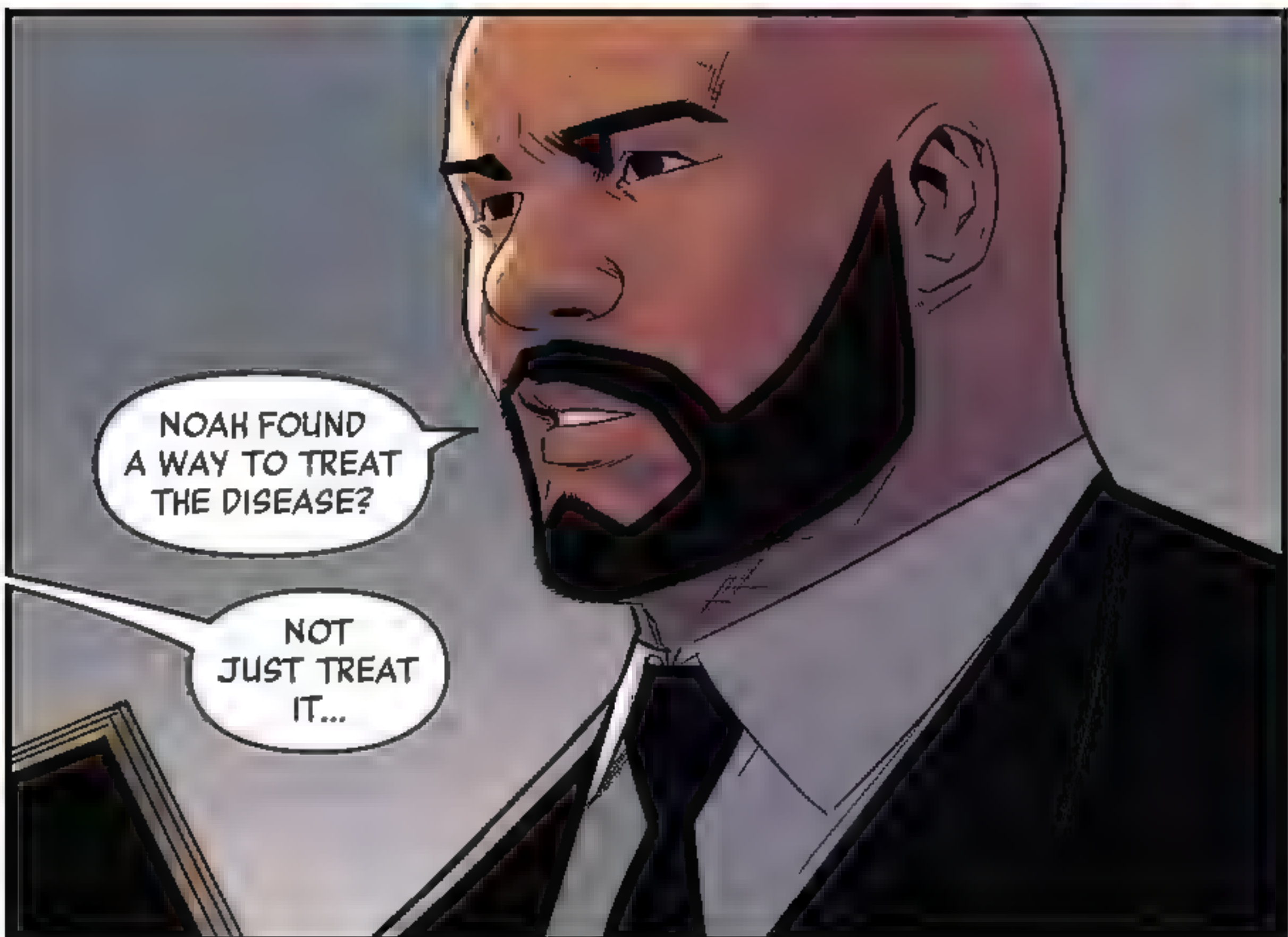


...AND TIME AND TIME AGAIN WE HEARD THE SAME THING: "THERE'S NO HOPE FOR YOUR SON."

THEN I HEARD ABOUT BURSTEIN AND HIS EXPERIMENTS IN GENETIC REGENERATION AND CELLULAR RESTRUCTURING.



THIS IS INCREDIBLE.



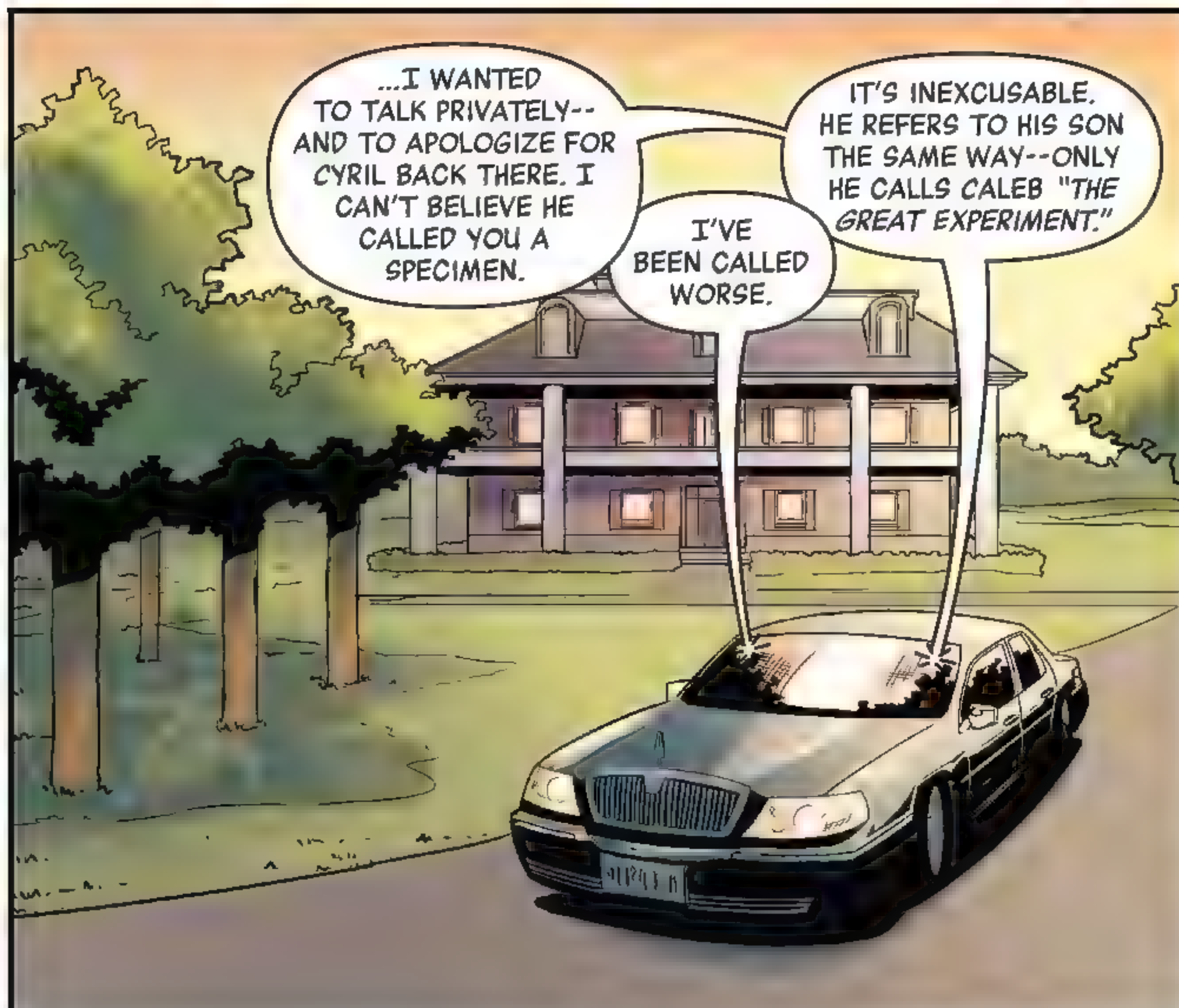
NOAH FOUND A WAY TO TREAT THE DISEASE?

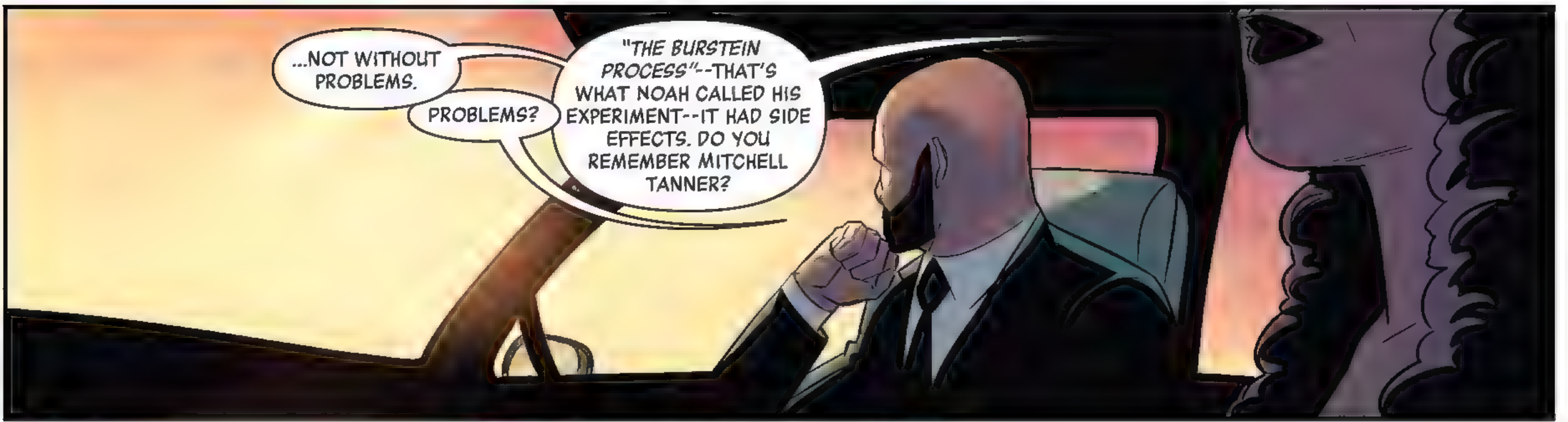
NOT JUST TREAT IT...



...HE REVERSED IT.

IT WAS NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE. AND IT ALL SPRANG FROM HIS EARLIER EXPERIMENTS WITH YOU--WITH HIS ATTEMPT TO RE-CREATE THE SUPER-SOLDIER FORMULA.

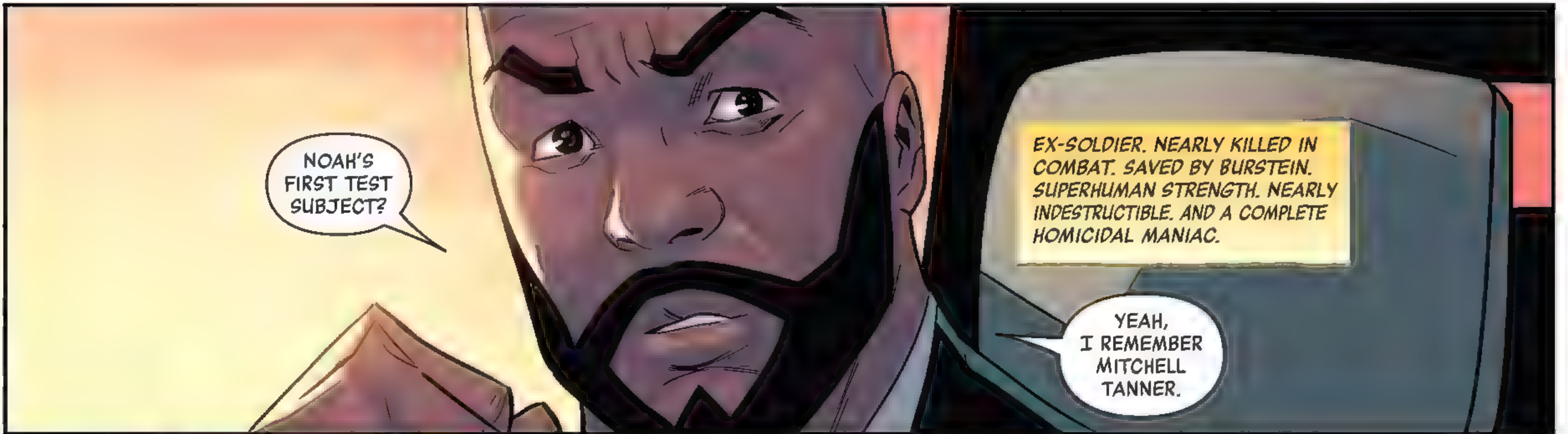




...NOT WITHOUT PROBLEMS.

PROBLEMS?

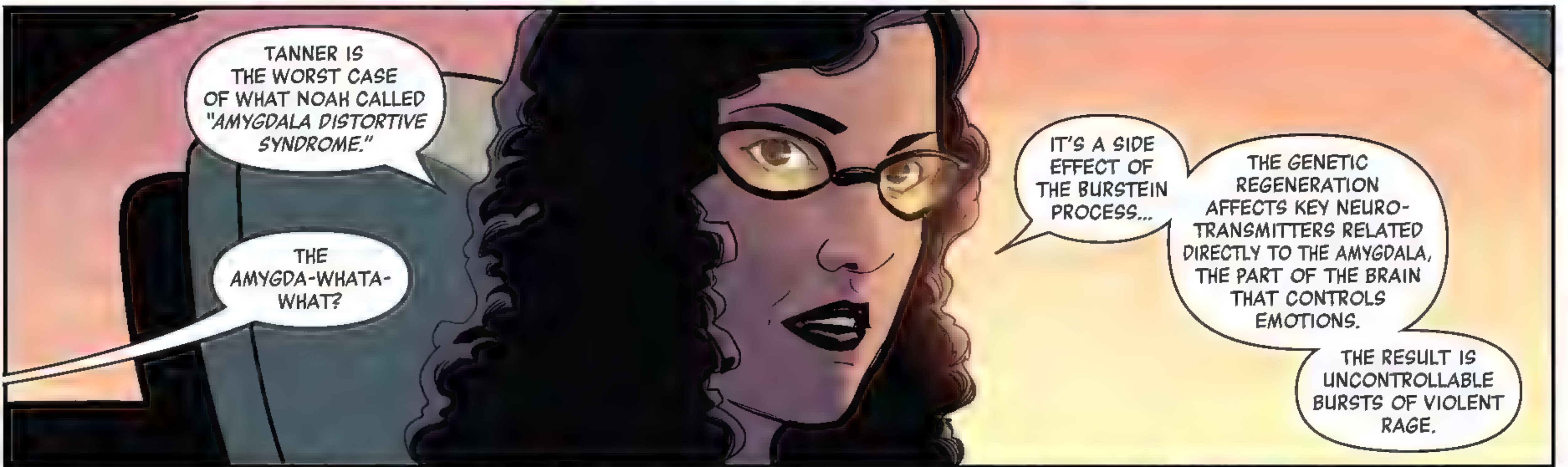
"THE BURSTEIN PROCESS"--THAT'S WHAT NOAH CALLED HIS EXPERIMENT--IT HAD SIDE EFFECTS. DO YOU REMEMBER MITCHELL TANNER?



NOAH'S FIRST TEST SUBJECT?

EX-SOLDIER. NEARLY KILLED IN COMBAT. SAVED BY BURSTEIN. SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH. NEARLY INDESTRUCTIBLE. AND A COMPLETE HOMICIDAL MANIAC.

YEAH, I REMEMBER MITCHELL TANNER.



TANNER IS THE WORST CASE OF WHAT NOAH CALLED "AMYGDALA DISTORTIVE SYNDROME."

THE AMYGDA-WHATA-WHAT?

IT'S A SIDE EFFECT OF THE BURSTEIN PROCESS...

THE GENETIC REGENERATION AFFECTS KEY NEURO-TRANSMITTERS RELATED DIRECTLY TO THE AMYGDALA, THE PART OF THE BRAIN THAT CONTROLS EMOTIONS.

THE RESULT IS UNCONTROLLABLE BURSTS OF VIOLENT RAGE.



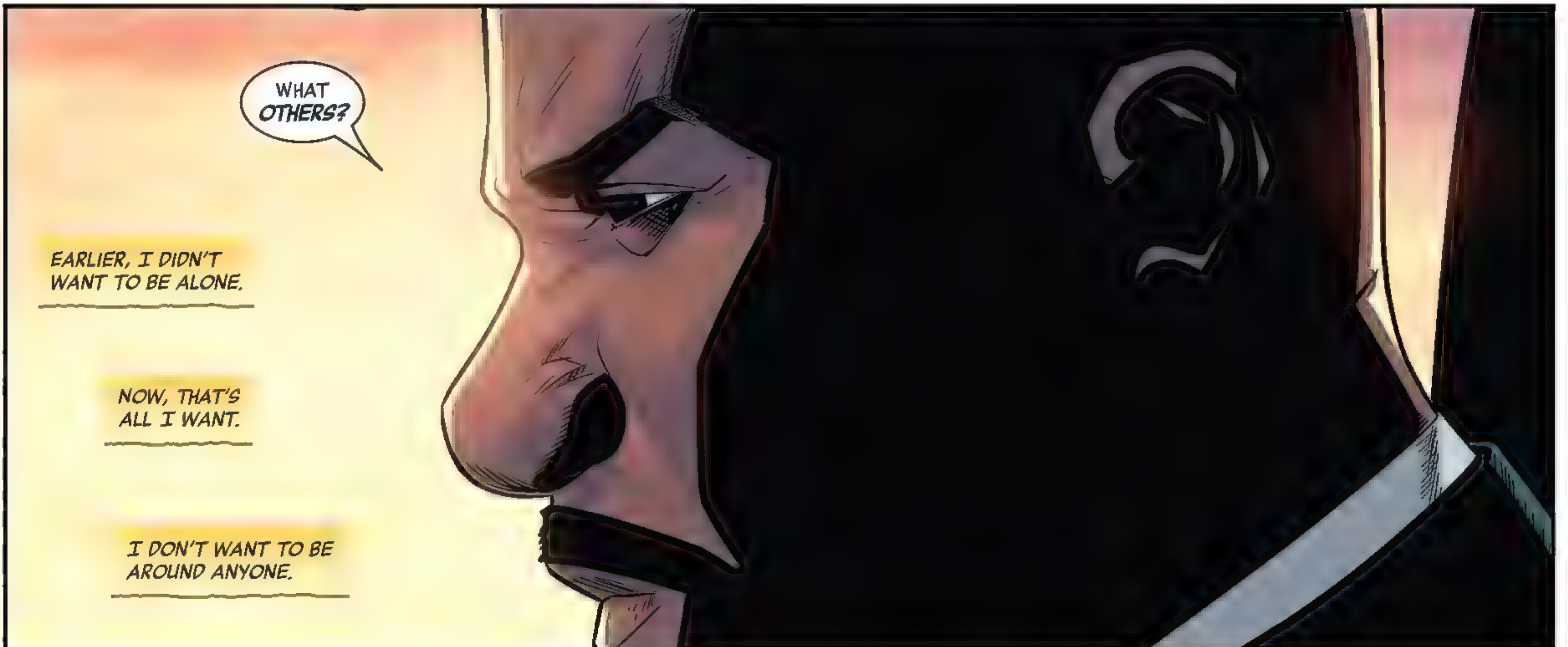
HOLD ON-- YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT KID BACK THERE, CALEB MORGAN--HE GETS AS CRAZY AS MITCHELL TANNER? A PSYCHOPATH?



NO, LIKE I SAID, TANNER IS THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO.

CALEB'S OUTBURSTS AREN'T NEARLY AS BAD, AND HE DOESN'T HAVE THE ENHANCED STRENGTH OF TANNER.

BUT THE OTHERS...



WHAT OTHERS?

EARLIER, I DIDN'T WANT TO BE ALONE.

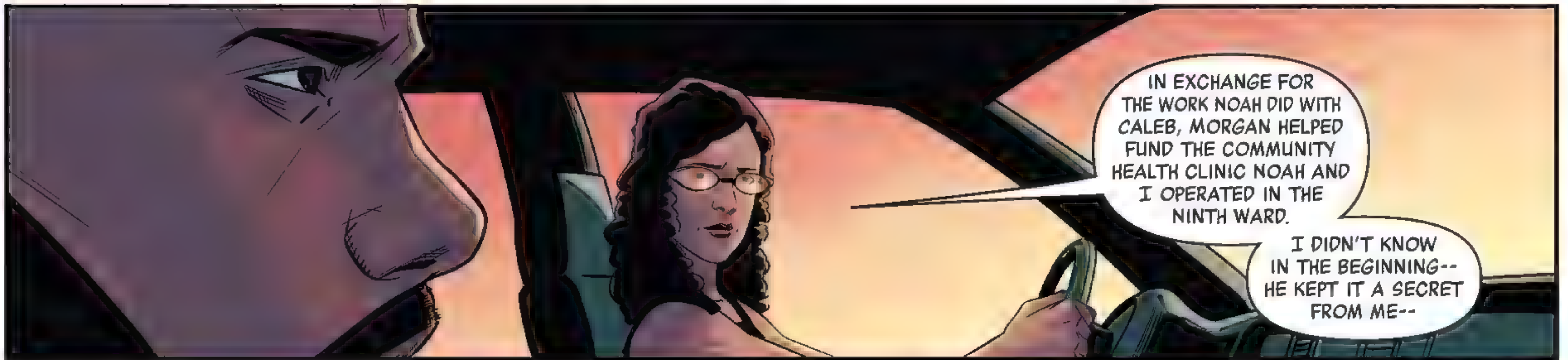
NOW, THAT'S ALL I WANT.

I DON'T WANT TO BE AROUND ANYONE.



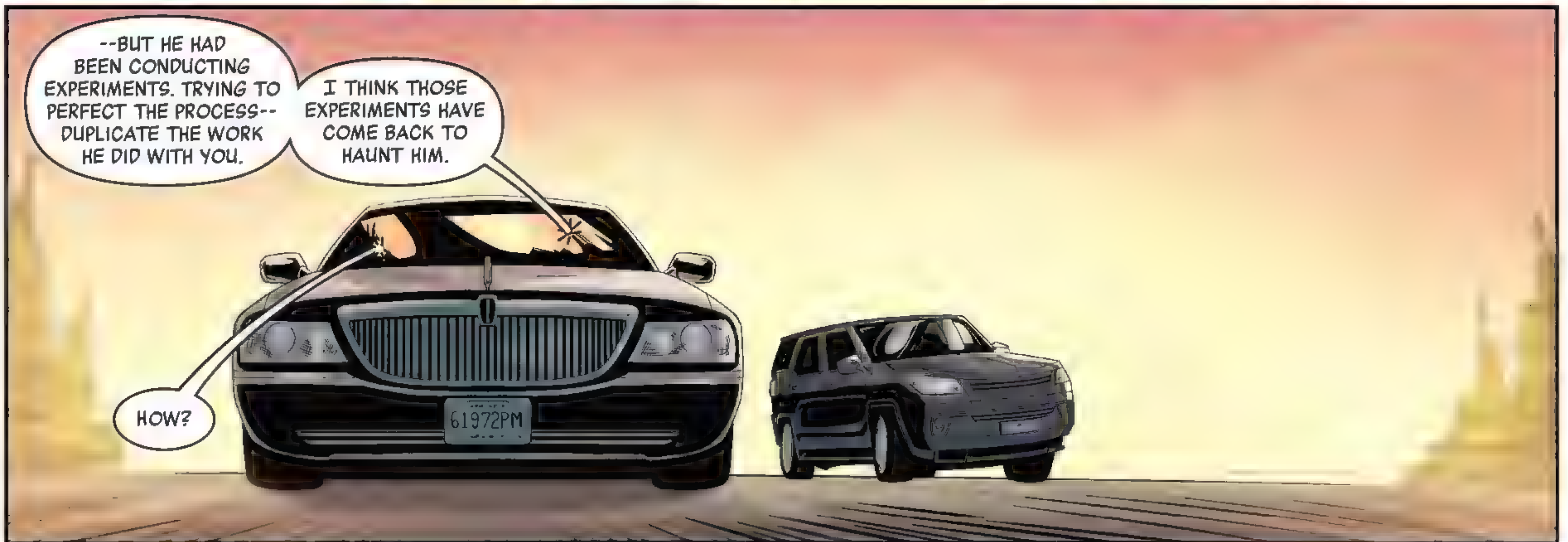
NOAH WORKED FOR MORGAN FOR YEARS--TREATING CALEB, PERFECTING THE PROCESS. BUT...WELL...THERE WERE OTHERS.

OKAY, LENORE, YOU NEED TO START FROM THE BEGINNING.



IN EXCHANGE FOR THE WORK NOAH DID WITH CALEB, MORGAN HELPED FUND THE COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC NOAH AND I OPERATED IN THE NINTH WARD.

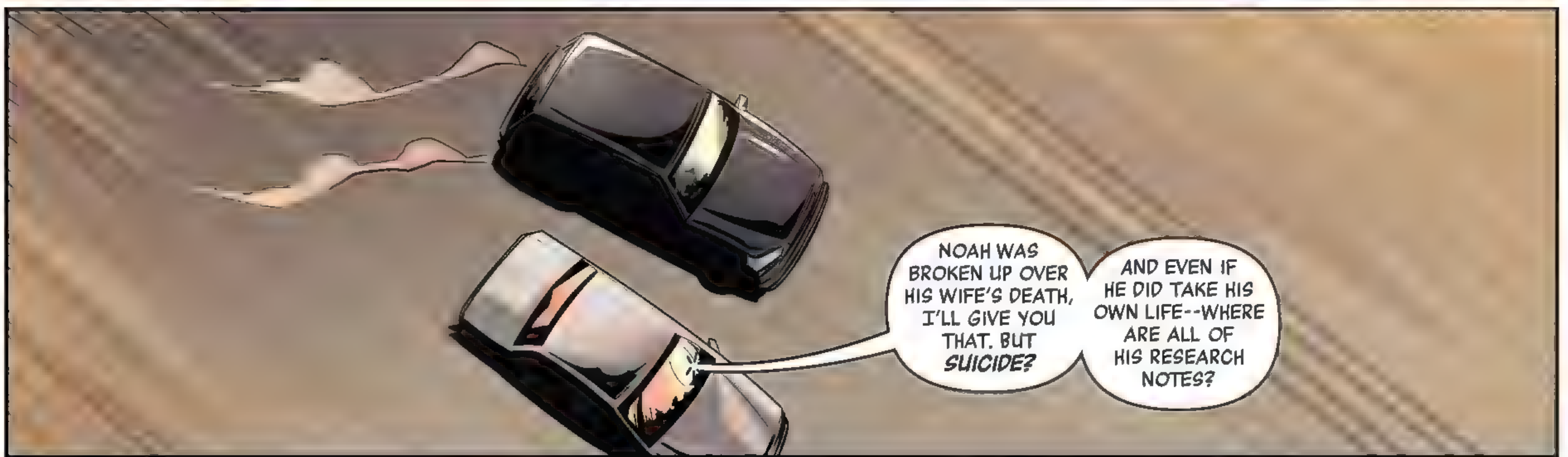
I DIDN'T KNOW IN THE BEGINNING-- HE KEPT IT A SECRET FROM ME--



--BUT HE HAD BEEN CONDUCTING EXPERIMENTS. TRYING TO PERFECT THE PROCESS-- DUPLICATE THE WORK HE DID WITH YOU.

I THINK THOSE EXPERIMENTS HAVE COME BACK TO HAUNT HIM.

HOW?



NOAH WAS BROKEN UP OVER HIS WIFE'S DEATH, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT. BUT **SUICIDE?**

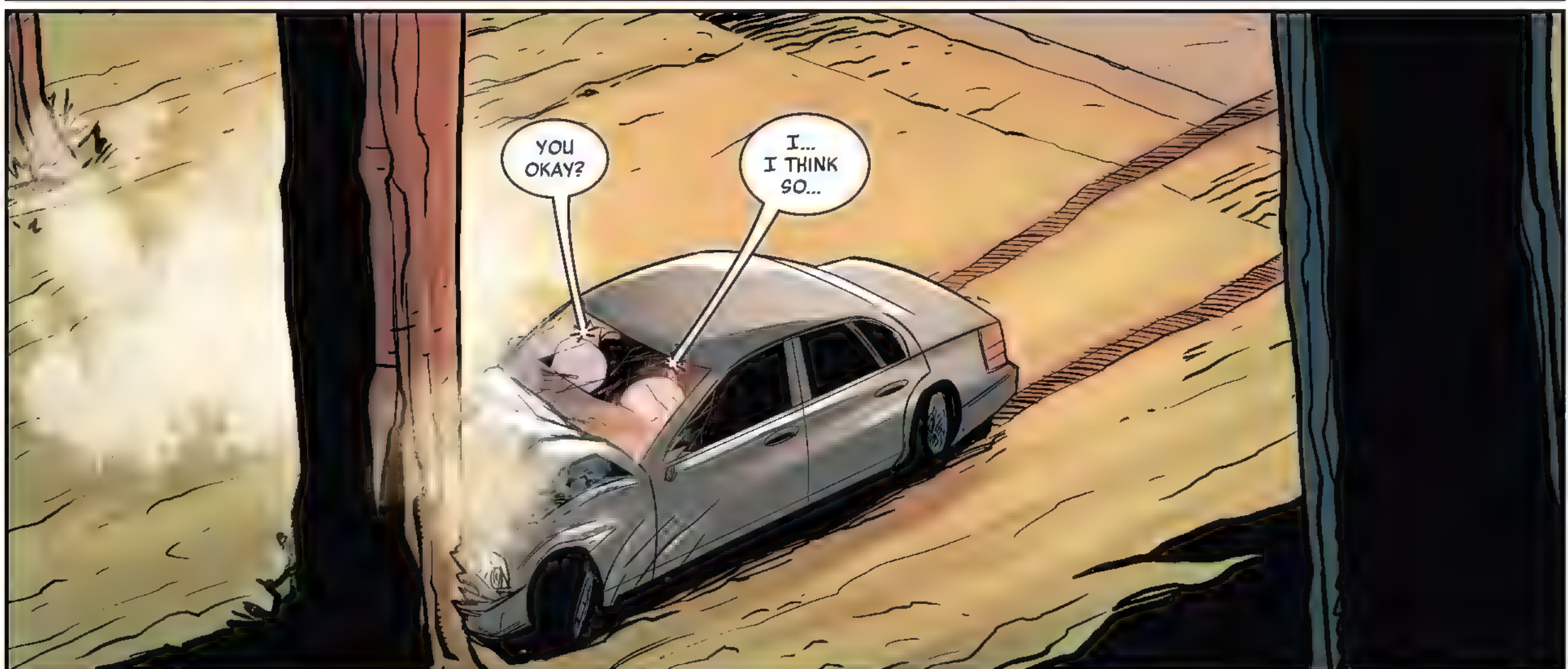
AND EVEN IF HE DID TAKE HIS OWN LIFE--WHERE ARE ALL OF HIS RESEARCH NOTES?

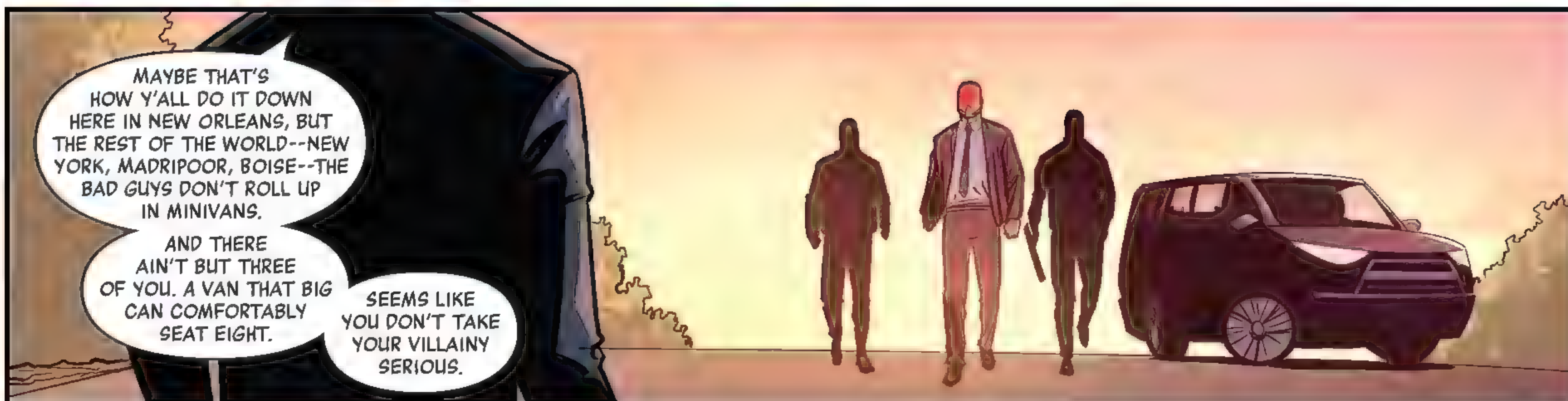


LENORE, I HEAR EVERYTHING YOU'RE SAYING, BUT I WANT TO BE CLEAR, SO THERE'S NO MISUNDERSTANDING--

--YOU DON'T THINK NOAH TOOK HIS OWN LIFE?

NO, I DON'T. I THINK SOMEONE ELSE...







HULK. RED HULK. BLUE HULK.
SHE-HULK. THOR. LADY THOR.
MAGNETO. DR. DOOM. ALL OF
'EM HAVE CLOCKED ME GOOD.

POW



I'VE BEEN PUNCHED
BY MONSTERS. LIKE,
FOR-REAL MONSTERS.
THIS GUY...



THIS GUY IS
SOMETHING
ELSE...



...HE HITS HARDER
THAN ALL OF 'EM.



BUT LIKE THE
SONG SAYS...



**LUKE!
HELP!**



...THE HARDER
THEY COME...

KRAK



...THE HARDER
THEY FALL!

WHACK



GOTTA
GIVE IT TO
YOU--YOU'RE
STRONG.



BUT THIS
IS OVER. UNLESS
YOU WANT YOUR
ASS KICKED SOME
MORE.



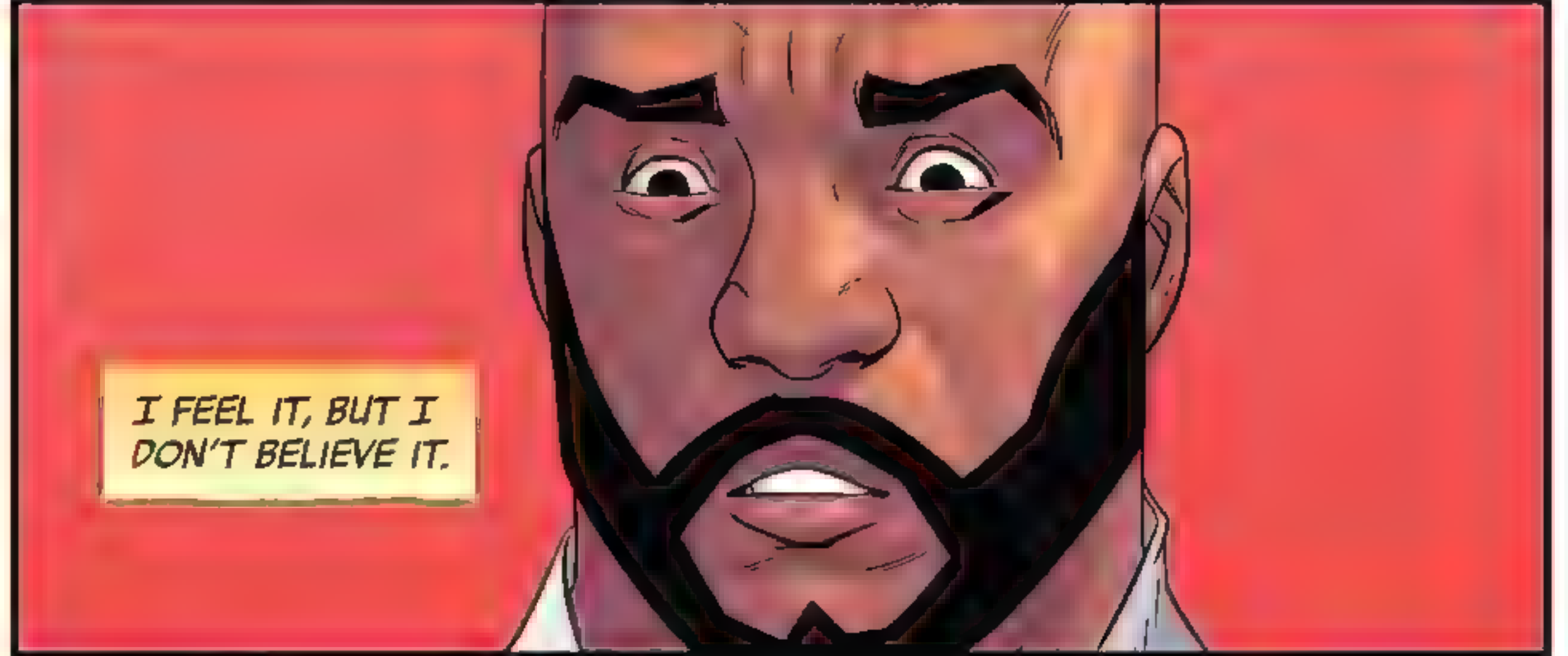
CHING
CHING
CHING

YOU'RE
RIGHT...

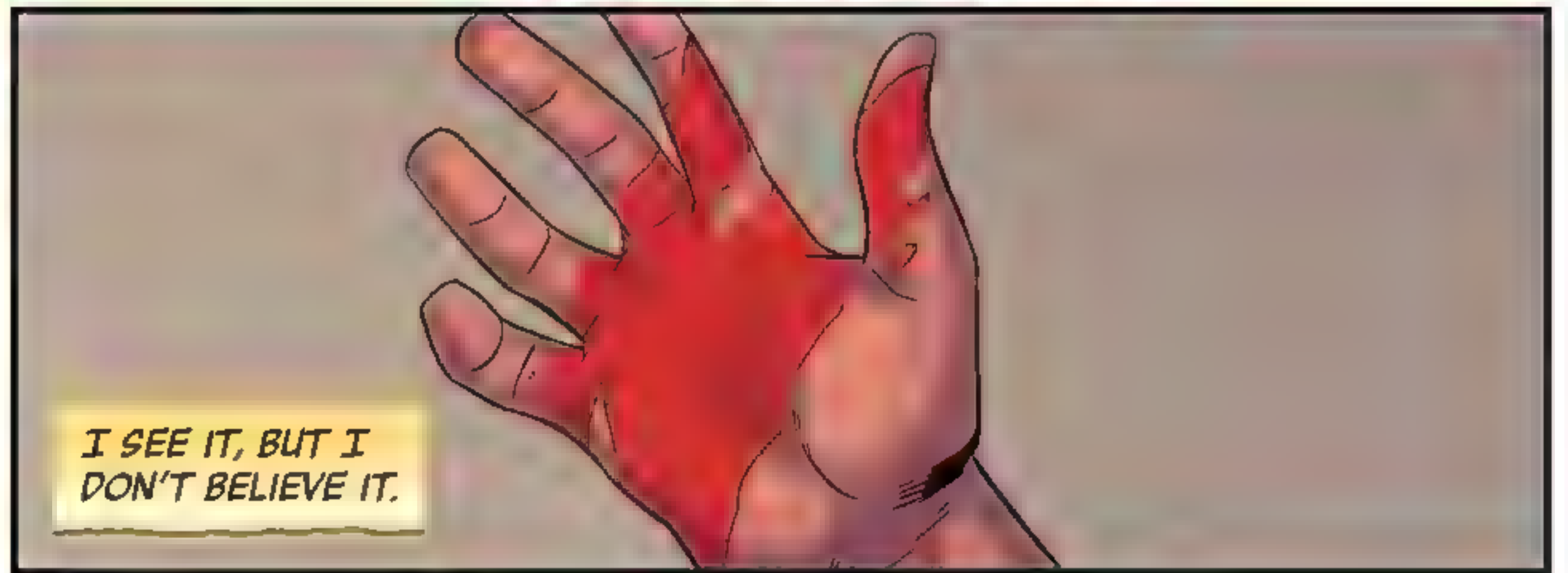


...THIS IS
OVER!

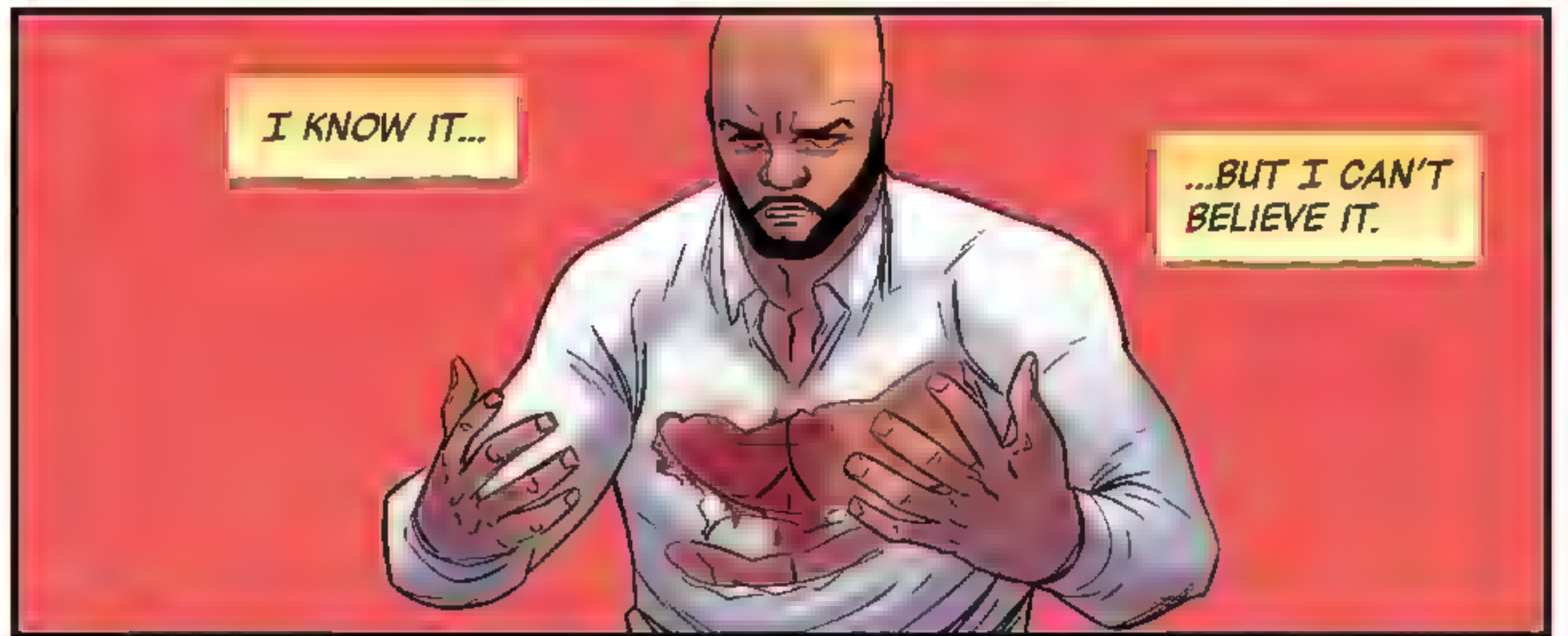
SLASH



I FEEL IT, BUT I
DON'T BELIEVE IT.



I SEE IT, BUT I
DON'T BELIEVE IT.



I KNOW IT...

...BUT I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT.

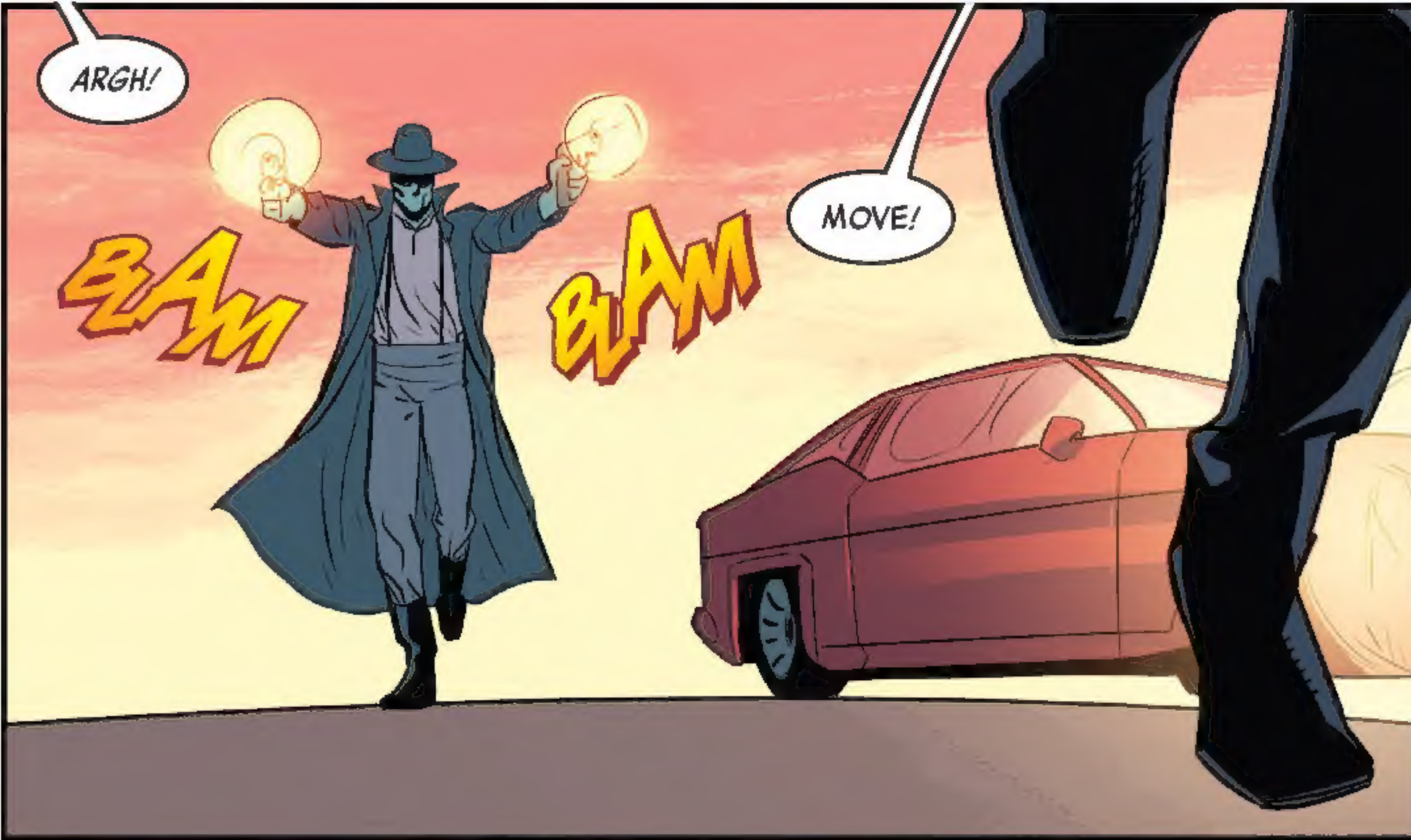


DAMN!

AND BY THE TIME I BELIEVE
IT--BY THE TIME IT FINALLY
SINKS IN...

...I'M IN OVER
MY HEAD.

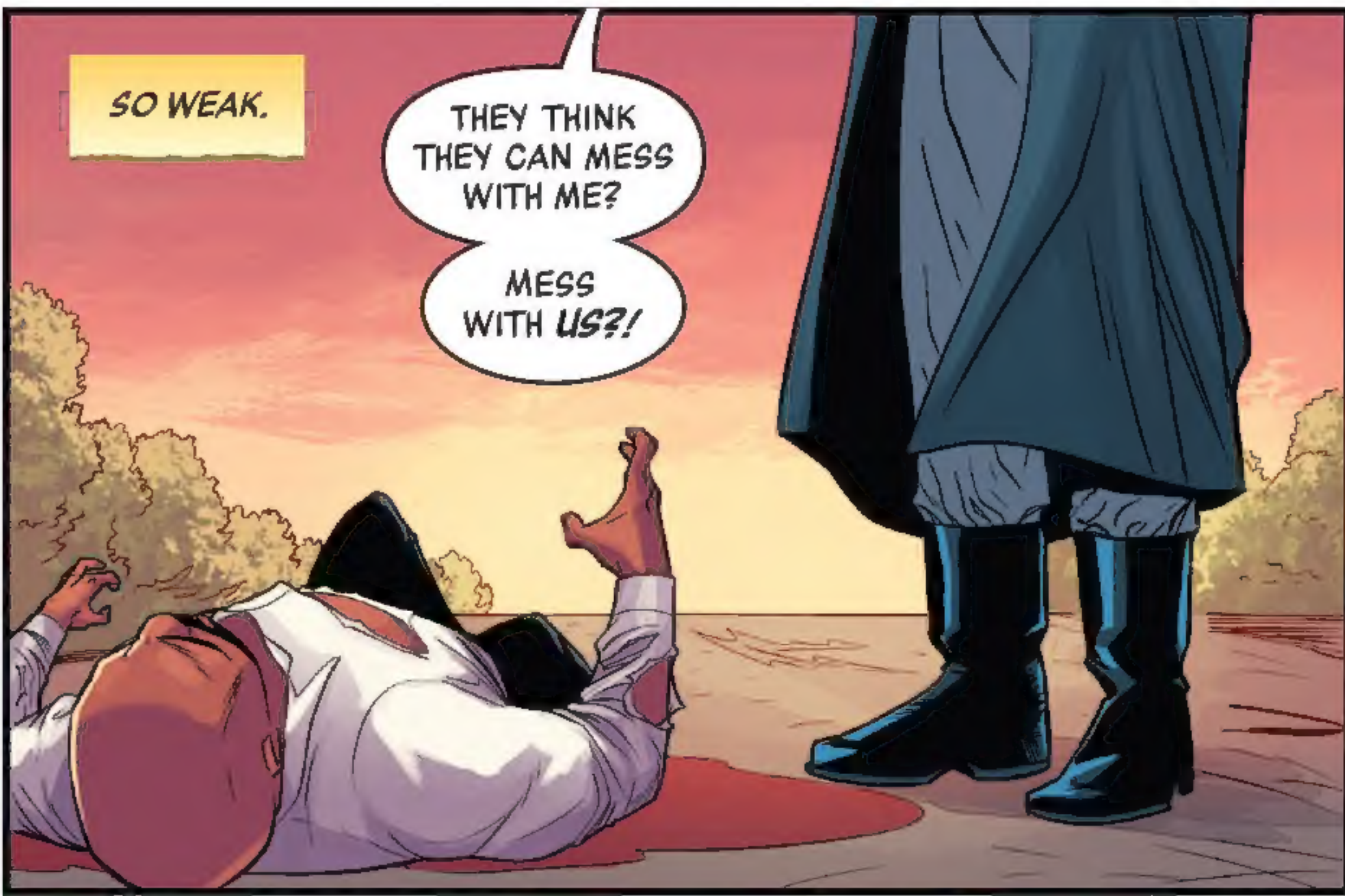
Slice





DON'T KNOW HOW THIS HAPPENED.

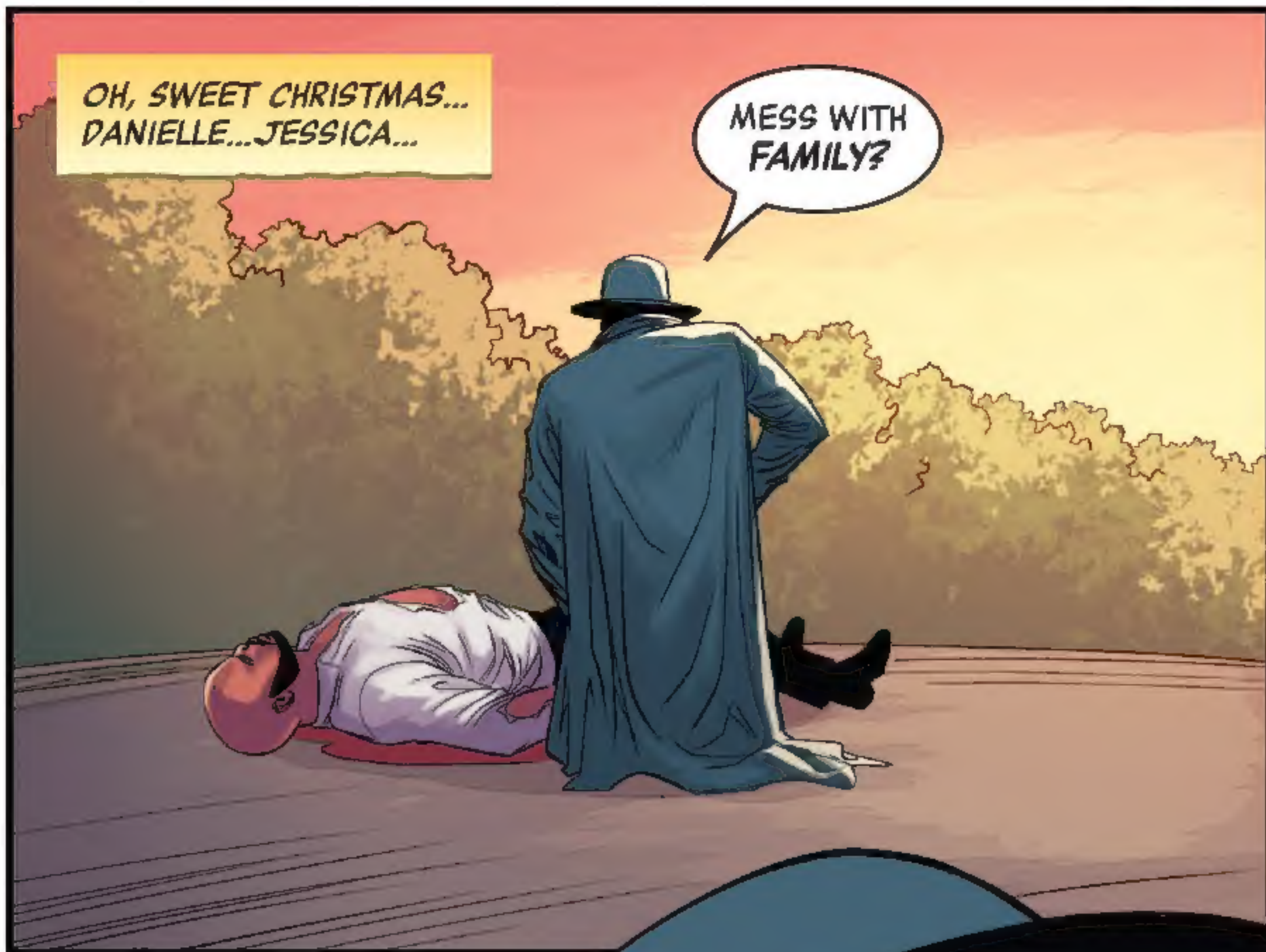
THAT'S RIGHT! RUN!



SO WEAK.

THEY THINK THEY CAN MESS WITH ME?

MESS WITH US?!



OH, SWEET CHRISTMAS... DANIELLE... JESSICA...

MESS WITH FAMILY?



...I'M DYING...

WHO...?

WHAT'S THE MATTER-- YOU'RE NOT HAPPY TO SEE ME?



MITCHELL? MITCHELL TANNER?

...THE ANGEL OF DEATH HAS COME FOR ME...

IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO SEE YOU, LITTLE BROTHER.

POWER MAIL

Send us your letters at mheroes@marvel.com and mark them "okay to print"!

If memory serves me correctly, my introduction to Luke Cage came more than three years after his debut in the world of comics. My cousin Sean and I saw our first issue of LUKE CAGE, POWER MAN--issue #37, to be exact--on the comic rack at a 7-Eleven in Virginia. This was in 1976, and Sean will back me up when I say that this particular comic book changed our lives.

For two black kids growing up in the 1970s, Luke was unlike anything we had ever seen. Sure, we liked Falcon, but he didn't have his own series--it was Captain America AND Falcon. But this Luke Cage guy? He had his own comic! He didn't have to share it with anyone, and, more important, he wasn't the sidekick. And even though neither of us actually knew any black people that talked like Luke Cage, Sean and I accepted him for who he was--OUR hero. The very existence of Luke meant that we could be more than just the sidekick--the spotlight could shine on someone who looked a bit like us.

More than 40 years later, I find myself in a place I only dreamed of as a kid--I'm actually writing the solo adventures of Luke Cage. I can't tell you how lucky I am. I hope this chapter of Luke's life means as much to others as it did to Sean and me, so many years ago. This series is dedicated to those two kids in 1976 that went into a 7-Eleven for comic books and Slurpees, and came out knowing that there was a super hero that spoke for them and to them (in a weird kind of jive-talk vernacular). At the same time, this series is for more than just my cousin and me; it is for everyone--old fans and new fans--all the people who know that Luke Cage is, quite simply, one of the greatest super heroes of all time. Thank you to the entire artistic and editorial team that is making this series come to life. Sweet Christmas.

David F. Walker

Welcome to LUKE CAGE, everyone! Thanks to David F. Walker for playing us out, and for planning an action-packed mystery that will take you down to the core of what makes Luke a hero, and back out through his fists, which help. With Nelson Blake II's precise, thoughtful art, Marcio Menyz's full, vibrant colors, and Joe Sabino's lettering perfectly calibrated to this blend of pop and noir, get ready to *laissez les bons temps rouler*! Be sure to write in to mheroes@marvel.com, let us know if you are in fact having a good time, and tell us your thoughts are "okay to print"! AND come back next month! (It's not like you can resist Rahzzah's incredible cover anyway, right?)

Here we go!
Kathleen Wisneski
Assistant Editor

NEXT



